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"I DASN'T THINK OF IT!"

A comedy. Prologue and three acts

TIME 1916

By Louise R. DeLisle

SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY

Mina Larson had a sister, Johanna Mann (nicknamed Joe), who disappeared as mysteriously as if the earth had opened and swallowed her up.

Lars Larson, Mina's husband, a good for naught whom she met when she was chasing a clue to find Joe, and with whom she subsequently immigrated to Canada.

Alpha, their daughter, who is affected and has a propensity to use long words and high flown language. She expects to marry a millionaire.

Beta, the second daughter, stands in awe of Alpha's conversational ability, and considers it an education to live in the house with her.

Gamma, the third daughter, is a beauty and has innate refinement. The family thinks her common and not over intelligent.

Omega is the baby

Joe Mann, Mina's sister who disappeared mysteriously.

Lucinda, Joe Mann's housekeeper.

Jane, a former second girl in Joe Mann's home, who is blackmailing Joe.

Larz, the Swede (who is Larz Larson, supposed to have been drowned).

Mrs. Strange-Ade and Inez Holland, two scientists experimenting in biology to find the secret element of life.

Attendant of sanatorium who dasn't think of it.

Little Joe, Jane's four year old son.

And others—neighbors who come in to borrow Mina's furniture.

PROLOGUE

THE LABORATORY

JANE, *surprised*:

Larz! Why do you come here in that condition? Do you want the lady scientist to know that I've got a drunken husband to support? Go—before she gets here.

LARZ:

By gall! look a here, Jane. I vant tha money I bane toll you get from Yoe Mann.

JANE:

He refused to give it—And I want you to understand right now, Larz, that I've quit. You've nearly beat the life out of me to make me blackmail Mr. Mann; but I won't do it again if you tear me to pieces. I'm ashamed to think of the mean things you've made me say to that man, just to get money out of him. But I'm through; so do your worst.

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19002 LARS:

Ah, tha's tha vay tha wife obey tha husband in tha States, eh?—hie—Ain't you satisfy you get you bed an' you board free, eh? Ain't you satisfy you ain't go to work no more in tha fute mill, eh? Ain't you satisfy I don't tack ever cent you earn as tha law allow, eh? By gall!—hie—I do vot I promise—I skoll tack little Yoeey to tha Canada to-night; an' you never see ham no more. Than you bane satisfy vid yousel.
(Exit Lars).

JANE, terrified:

O God! My baby. My baby! (She grabs her hat and rushes out).

(Enter Inez Holland through the other door. She begins to experiment in biology).

MRS. STRANGE-ADE, entering:

Morning, Inez—(She goes around examining test tubes).

INEZ, surprised:

Mrs. Strange-Ade! How did you get out of the sanatorium?

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:—

Walked out—What discoveries have you made in biological research since I've away? (Scrutinizing test tube.) This test tube seems to contain a perfect affinity to embryology, as we be'ong as much to the vegetable as to the animal kingdom, naturally, we must find the secret element of life in synthetic chemistry; but like all scientists, we have been working in the dark, as it were, until Madam Curie discovered radium.—Unless all signs fail, the secret of reaction lies there and, eventually, it shall be found.

INEZ:—

We must not be too sanguine, although my last test has apparently solved the mystery. (She holds up the fatherless frog to the astonished gaze of Mrs. Strange-Ade).

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

Most wonderful specimen that I have ever—

INEZ:

Professor Jacques Loeb produced a fatherless frog from the unfertilized egg; according to the law of nature the unfertilized egg does not possess the male brain cells, this one was generated by means of the artificial fertilizing element.

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

Astonishing specimen— How—

INEZ:

With the emanation of radium in the applicator, than—in juxtaposition and the container of artificial compound and the saline—(She looks around cautiously). Even the walls have ears. It would not be ethical to let the secret seep out before it is published in the Medical Journal. Suffice it to say that there was radio activity, and a simple chemical reaction produced the element which has heretofore evaded our researches.

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

This improvement on Dr. Jacques Loeb's discovery when perfected shows that man is bound to lose his job of procreator of the race.

INEZ:

We know that the law of evolution is always upward and discards that which becomes unnecessary. Science must lend a hand—as long as there is sex attraction, there shall be immorality in the world.

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

With the elimination of sex attraction—it will be a walk over for advanced feminists to free men of alimonious dependents.

INEZ:

It is a question whether men will consider that an equivalent for the loss of fatherhood.

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

Great gains have some losses— Reformers have been looking eagerly to scientists for man's substitute as a great boon toward abolishing the double standard of morals. But—if women should object?

INEZ:

Women have never as yet objected to any new styles... A few men pooh pooh the idea that, in the course of evolution, woman shall be the sole creator of the race; but Dr. Martin Kellog Schermerhorn, of the Department of Philosophy, at Harvard, is more optimistic. He believes that in the distant future, we shall be made in baby factories as chicks are hatched in incubators.

MRS. SADE, laughing:

An incubator without the hen would be as useful as a wash-tub without water.

INEZ:

The first females produced their families without the aid of the males.

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

Even Dr. Jacques Loeb was dumfounded at the astonishing discovery never before suspected by scientists, that there still exists on the Pacific coasts a mother fish which produces her family without the assistance of the father fish— That is the place to refresh one's memory.

INEZ:

As to the chemically begotten child being brainless—

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

Tush— (Picks up frog) This is a dead one. (Taking scalpel). Look at the cerebellum of this fatherless frog. The cerebral lobes are abnormally developed. Have you ever seen convolutions like those in the human brain under present production? Besides, children get the best part of brain cells from the mother; and the unimpaired chemical brain cells of the comming fatherless child—

INEZ, looking around cautiously:

Sssh— No so loud!

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

Why so cautious and secretive? When we know the fatherless child is on its way. However, that is for future generations. It is up to this generation to do something for those little ones born out of wedlock. Do you happen to know an Assemblyman who is also a humanitarian?

INEZ:

Why, yes. Joe Mann, who lives on Long Island.

MRS. SADE, hears honk of automobile and jumps nervously:

He's getting restless— Come— I shall tell you on the way of the law that I want passed. When that Assemblyman sees the names of the eminent doctors who favored my bill (laughs) at the bug-house— excuse me, sanatorium, he will fall in with the plan. They thought they were humoring me.

—Curtain—

ACT I.

Living room in Joe Mann's home on Long Island.

(R) door bell rings. Lucinda, housekeeper, comes in to living room with an armful of clothes and a suitcase. She lays down the suitcase and puts the clothes on the table and goes to open the door).

LUCINDA, opening door:

Oh, it is you, Jane. (Enter Jane and little Joe, her four year old son). Haven't I asked you as a favor to come around the back way? Why, even Mr. Mann comes around to the back door since we haven't a second girl. I don't know an other man who is so considerate— when he can't hold on to a latch key.

JANE, in her tough way:

I didn't come to see you— I'm here to see the G. O. P. on special business.

LUCINDA, laughing:

His personal appearance doesn't belie the cartoon of the Grand Old Party at any rate; but why should it when politics has always been his mainstay.

(Little Joe climbs on rocking chair and rocks recklessly. Lucinda begins to sew buttons on Joe Mann's pajamas).

JANE:

Is he in? I want to see him while I'm all worked up to the right pitch.

LUCINDA:

You haven't any conscience, Jane. And the worst part of your blackmailing scheme was to have named that child Joe. I believe that you don't know yourself who the father of that child really is... unless it is Lars, the Swede.

JANE, with a sneer:

Lars, the Swede—

LUCINDA:

For you were always running around to dances at Ectord Hall and North Beach, and the Lord only knows— Be careful, Joe, you will rock over and crack your skull— Besides, that child is nearly four years old, and it's only three years since you worked here.

JANE, in her tough way:

That don't cut no ice— Joe Mann had to befriend me after I put little Joe out to board; so he gave me the job of second girl.

LUCINDA:

That doesn't look like his style... Why, he's so generous a man that he doubles my salary now that I'm without help.

JANE:

They're all generous as long as they're interested in a woman.

LUCINDA:

Even as bad minded as you are, Jane— I'm sorry for you, for no girl ever throws herself at a man; but under the influence of a bad one. (Lucinda hops up)— See here you little mischief. Got down. (She takes him down and resumes work).

LITTLE JOE, sticking out tongue at Lucinda:

I don't like you any more.

JANE, affectionately:

Come to mamma, darling.

LUCINDA:

Talk about generosity— What other man would have brought Miss Ruth to his home the day she received her working papers.

JANE:

Most girls marry any old thing with a lot of money; but why did she refuse to marry him? Then, actually die of a broken heart. The poor fool!

LITTLE JOE:

"The poor fool!" (He puckers up his eyes and laughs as children do when they repeat thing at random).

(Lucinda motions toward little Joe).

JANE:

He don't understand.

LUCINDA:

I have never known so honorable a man! He always said that the man as well as the woman should make a clean breast of his past to the woman of his choice, and he doesn't go around preaching one thing and practicing another. If he busybodies around here hadn't gossiped about them I wouldn't have suggested marriage as the only way to save her reputation. Although her character was above reproach. He is such a moral man! Broken heart! Humph, she would have lived six months at factory work.

JANE:

He won't have much use for women now. He was so crazy about her.

LUCINDA:

Oh, he liked her, to be sure—in a way, but up to date, there is no indication that he has become a woman hater through unrequited love... to say nothing of breach of promise cases.

LITTLE JOE climbs on chair and jumps off:

Hoop a la!

LUCINDA:

Stop, you terrible child.

(Little Joe takes ornament off table).

LUCINDA hops up:

My, but you're a little imp. I do nothing but hop up— Put that down! (Sitting down) No one seems to know anything bad in his past life and he has lived on Long Island since he was a young man.

JANE:

Maybe Larz don't know, eh?

LUCINDA, with womanly curiosity aroused:

Has he told you all about it, Jane? (To little Joe) Come and sit on aunty's lap, dear. Go on, Jane. Has he told you all about it?

JANE:

Larz never told me in so many words—men never tell on one another and each other— (Little Joe slips off Lucinda's lap and takes wheels out of clock. Larz sneaks around and look through the window).

LUCINDA, cast/fallen:

No. "Not in so many words. The suspicious Swede.

JANE:

Didn't you discharge me to have him all to yourself? Now, true and honest, isn't that so?

LUCINDA:

Don't insinuate— I have been housekeeper for Mr. Mann nearly twelve years, and no man could be more of a gentleman. He is the most modest— Look! what he has done to the clock. (Lucinda takes clock from little Joe).

LITTLE JOE:

Mamma, make her give me the wheels.

(Little Joe runs around upsetting everything in his path).

LUCINDA:

Let's go to the kitchen where that little imp won't have anything more perishable than pots, pans and kettles to destroy.

JANE:

No. I'm going— Gee, I wish Joe Mann was here. On the level, I don't like this job, but—

LUCINDA:

You're a tough one, Jane.

(Larz who is waiting for Jane, sneaks around and glances in as Jane and little Joe are going toward (R) door. Jane catches a glimpse of him. She stands and looks desperate).

JANE:

(O God! Can I stand him off another day?). So long—

LUCINDA:

Come this way and go out the back door.

JANE:

It's unlucky to come in one door and go out another— It might bring you company. Or, more likely, burgars. So long... (They exit).

(Lucinda packs Joe Mann's suitcase. (L) door. Enter Joe Mann, and Larz who has been drinking).

Larz who has been drinking).

JOE MANN:

You are the most rabid— (Giving money to Larz). Oh, got my watch at Forda. And tell him to warrant that mainspring for at least twenty-four hours.

LARZ, taking money:

A skoll toll ham to do tha all right (with a wink), Meester Mann.

(Larz puts the bill in his trousers' pocket, but it falls on the floor as he withdraws his hand. (Exit Larz).

JOE MANN, glances up from desk where he is writing, sees the bill:

Larz—hey, Larz—come back here, you benighted bonehead.

(Joe Mann picks up the bill and follows Larz. (R) door bell rings. Lucinda opens door. Enter Mrs. Strange-Ade and Inez Holland).

INEZ:

We should like to see Mr. Mann. Is he in?

LUCINDA, *glancing around*:

He was here a minute ago.

(Re-enter Joe Mann. Lucinda continues to pack suitcase).

INEZ, *grasping Joe's hand*:

My partner, Mrs. Strang-Ade, scientist, reformer and...

MRS. STRANGE-ADE, *in loud voice, puffing out her chest*:

A reformer and reformed all along the line. And you know that the reformed are firm, steadfast and never waver.

JOE MANN, *under his breath*:

(The reformed are puritanical and never strike a happy medium).

Please be seated, ladies.

INEZ:

We are in a great, great hurry. (To Mrs. S-Ade) Make your speech brief and to the point.

(This starts an argument that looks like a woman's squabble).

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

It is up to you if you can do better than—

INEZ, *impatiently*:

Oh, hurry!

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

Why did you volunteer if...

INEZ:

Why did you ask if...

MRS. S-ADE:

Now what is the use of—

INEZ:

Oh, hurry—we shall discuss that when—

JOE MANN, *pacing floor*:

Just like women—When they are in a hurry!

LUCINDA:

Oh, I don't know as men always do things without arguing.

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

Well—

INEZ:

Such a waste of time!

MRS. STRANGE-ADE *prepares to speak to Joe Mann*:

Well—

INEZ, *nervously*:

Be careful of what you say and how you say it—He is a very sensitive man. I humor him.

MRS. STRANGE-ADE, *scornfully*:

Why so MEERK? You have just entered the happy bonds of matrimony. What cause can progress with such tame, afraid cat methods?

JOE MANN:

I am at your service, ladies.

(Mrs. Strange-Ade suddenly remembers what she came for).

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

Oh—Thank you.

INEZ *cautions her in a low whisper*:

Flatter him.

MRS. S-ADE, *with a withering glance*:

Forget it—(To Joe) Mr. Mann, we have come to ask you to present a bill at Albany. We want a law to compel men to give their name and support to their children born out of wedlock.

JOE MANN:

That will fill a long felt want.

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

As one, of the two thousand women, who signed the petition for the betterment of child labor laws, I felt so insulted when told that the signature of two thousand mice would be just as effective, that I plunged with renewed vigor in to scientific research to find the elemental secret of life—So that woman—

(Inez is tugging at Mrs. S-Ade's skirt, trying to restrain her).

INEZ:

I use more diplomacy, I—

MR. S-ADE:

Poor MEEK—

JOE MANN:

My dear ladies... You should wear pants!

(Womanlike they jump to the conclusion that they have been insulted).

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

What an insult!

INEZ:

What do you think of that? When he knows that we would be arrested. Such ingratitude! women worked so hard for his nomination.

(When they begin the onslaught, Joe winces and tries to put in a word).

JOE MANN, under his breath:

(It's damn hard to be a man). Pardon me, ladies. I—I—was going to say that the law and the law makers never discriminate against anything that wears pants.

Mrs. S-Ade and Inez look at each other in surprise and are pacified).

INEZ, elated:

Isn't he the loveliest man!

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

Simply charming!

JOE MANN:

Our child labor laws and the law of consent are a disgrace to the Christian Era.

MRS. STRANGE-ADE and INEZ, in chorus:

Isn't that just like a woman!

(The exclamation makes Joe suspect that his identity has been discovered, and he looks toward Lucinda and says imploringly).

JOE MANN:

Beer—

(Mrs. Strande-Ade doesn't notice Joe's confusion and goes on enthusiastically).

MRS. S-ADE:

You are the only man I have met who seems to understand women (coming nearer). So I tell you confidentially: if we cannot have this bill passed, we intend to set off a few fireworks—

(Inez has been trying to restrain her by pulling her gown).

INEZ:

Don't antagonize—

JOE MANN frowns:

I am afraid, ladies, that that method—

INEZ, to Mrs. Strange-Ade:

I am always deferential—politely yielding, I—

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

I have the English temperament— And Carrie, including all nations are militant even when they want a boundary line. We are not demanding privileges. (She brings her fist down on the table, and Joe Mann jumps as if shot). We want only a square deal for those little ones.

JOE MANN:

It is hard for women to get what they need without the ballot. (With a sly, reminiscent smile) I wonder how they would use it if they had it.

MRS. STRANGE-ADE, under her breath:

Chestnuts!

INEZ, coquettishly:

Women never give away their secrets.

MRS. STRANGE-ADE, ostentatiously:

Take it from a woman who has the courage of her convictions. (Striking a pose of assurance) We intend to restore the matriarchate— if you have kept abreast of the times; you must know that woman can defy even the rapid strides that science is making to dethrone man as father of the race.

JOE MANN, *positively*:

No scientific discovery can ever take the place of man in biology.

INEZ:

I never wound his self-esteem— Don't contradict.

MRS. S-ADE:

Then you don't believe what is sure to happen.

JOE MANN, *chuckles*:

The suffragettes tolerate us; but the women scientists want to get us entirely off the map of fatherhood— Do you mean to say that the "lord of creation" is only the makeshift of Providence?

INEZ, *tugging at Mrs. S-Ade's gown*:

Humor him.

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

Watch me humor him— Scientists are the sensitized instruments of Providence. And the fatherless child is the next step in evolution. (Inez still trying to restrain her). Who believed in aerial navigation in 1860?

JOE MANN:

I am glad that you have nothing more tangible on which to base your contention.

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

You give the Almighty little credit for genius. Did He not evolve us from a bit of protoplasm? And can He not find new ways to perpetuate the race?

JOE MANN:

If man ever gets off the payroll of Providence, the affinity business will be ruined.

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

And how for foundlings will file petitions in bankruptcy. Get our bill through, and put the tax where it belongs.

JOE MANN:

It may be hard to convince the Assemblymen— But I will try, ladies.

MRS. S-ADE *grasps Joe's arm*:

You are the loveliest man!

INEZ *grasps Joe's left arm*:

With all their faults, how could we live without them?

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

How could we? I shall take this as a souvenir. (She takes Joe's necktie, the stiff collar flies off the button).

INEZ:

Man's substitute would be the most unkindest cut of all— I shall take this as a souvenir of the dearest man. (She takes Joe's ring, and the tableau moves toward the door).

JOE MANN, *as they go out*:

If you want any more souvenirs, ladies—send the moving van around. (Joe shuts the door and comes back laughing). It would tickle me if, some day, scientists could put it over the favored sex.

(Lucinda looks up in amazement).

JOE MANN, *reflectively*:

As advanced as we think ourselves, we still have States without equal guardianship. States where mothers do not own those little ones for whom they paid the price of torture. Man, at that price, would want the world with a fence around it. (Looking at Lucinda) A—a—a—penny for your thoughts, Lucinda?

LUCINDA:

I was thinking that you are living ahead of your time. No other man would be tickled to death to have a scientific discovery take the place of father.

(Attendant of sanatorium rushing in).

ATTENDANT:

One of our patients, Mrs. Strange-Ade, has escaped from the sanatorium. (Panting) She is here. (He drops in chair gasping for breath).

JOE MANN:

She has been here, but I didn't think she was an escaped lunatic.

ATTENDANT, weeping:

It's a sad, sad case (sobs). She was the greatest leader any non-progressives ever had when she got the delusion that she was a reformer and a militant suffragette (more sobs).

JOE MANN:

Buck up—buck up, old chap. Lucinda, run and get that bottle of Tammany Silent Influence and white cherries.

LUCINDA, handing bottle to Joe:

Here, put in a spoonful of Mrs. Winslow's soothing syrup. It helped my toothache.

(Joe Mann pours whiskey, holding three fingers against the glass while Lucinda pours in soothing syrup).

JOE MANN, giving glass to attendant:

This cocktail will quiet your nerves.

ATTENDANT suppresses a sob, drinks with relish, clears throat:

When she gets violent she predicts the restoration of the matriarchate (weeps); that horrible period when women ruled the world and gave their husbands only a collar button and a wooden box to keep it in, for doing all the house work, besides being the bread-winners (weeps). And they wouldn't even let them come home a-l-o-n-e in the d-a-r-k. (In despair) I wasn't think of it! I wasn't think of it! Wiping tears off his long, old-fashioned whiskers). I must get her back to the sanatorium before she plants the seed of anarchy among those (bitterly) suffragettes.

(R) Exit attendant. (L) Enter Larz, he gives watch to Joe who makes a gesture, indicating to keep the change).

JOE MANN:

The old party is in great distress. Poor fellow—Gad, I wish it were in my power to give women a chance to help make the laws.

LARZ, craftily:

Ah, Meester Mann,—hic—The American man es all lack you; ham got soft spot an' vork, vork, vork for American voman—in ma country,—hic—

JOE MANN, sitting down at desk to write:

Larz, you've had another drink since you went out. How can I truthfully recommend you as being a sober, industrious man?

LARZ:

In ma country—

LUCINDA:

He would be a credit to one party he is such a repeater when he is intoxicated.

LARZ:

In ma country—

JOE MANN:

Shut up about your country when I'm writing!

LARZ:

I skoll toll you tha voman es tha weaker sect... In ma country you skoll see—hic—on avery tombstone: "Erect to ma belove vife, Marie, age 22... Unda tha, "Also to ma belove vife Emma, age... (Joe who is writing rapidly glances at Larz from the corner of his eye). "Also—hic—to ma belove...

JOE MANN:

Hold on—Hold on! We do things differently—The juigfe decides the size of the gold brick—We hand around a few, if the supply doesn't equal the demand—we get the jug. You needn't rub the exterior of your interior economy with such gusto—I mean the safety jug.

LUCINDA:

He's as good as a show.

JOE MANN, taking stroll around room:

Oh, if you like it, say when.

LARZ:

The American man give tha voman all—

LUCINDA:

Don't rub it in, Larr. Our men are no better than the average. Though we've tried to bring them up in the way they should go. Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan, women have full suffrage. Canadian men have given proof of their generosity; and I dare say, scientific discovery takes the place of father—they will give in a grin.

LARR:

Hic—all tha liberty to go out widout cover her face.

JOE MANN:

You're a Turk 'all right in that maudlin condition.

(Larr rises unsteadily, singing).

Je veux vivre en ivrogne, je veux mourir en gueux
Si j'ai moins d'argent qu'eux j'aurai plus forte trogne,
Il vaut mieux moins d'argent, vivre et boire, vivre et boire,
Il vaut mieux moins d'argent, vivre et boire plus content.
(He sings with a Swedish accent).

LARR:

Haw—haw—haw— Ah toll ham. Ah skoll lack to see Yoe Ma play ball like tha ole vowan. Haw—haw—Meester Mann.

JOE MANN winces. Opens door:

Clear out you sot— And sleep off that jag before you try for the job. (Pushes hi mout. Larr' ironical laugh is heard as Joe shuts door). I wouldn't bother with him if he were not constantly bewailing his invalid wife. The scoundrel!

LUCINDA:

His wife is to be pitied—if he has one. But self preservation the first law of the selfish. He can't tend our furnace this winter.

JOE MANN:

I pity the poor devil.

LUCINDA:

Of course, you do... You are so different from other men.

JOE MANN:

An accident of birth, over which I had no control.

LUCINDA, after a pause:

Jane was here again, to-day.

JOE MANN:

If that one doesn't stay away from here, I'll have her pinched I have to lose my vote.

LUCINDA:

Lose your vote for trying to escape her blackmailing?

JOE MANN, confused:

Did I say my vote? I— I— meant my goat.

LUCINDA:

Lose your goat! I think you mean, "if she gets your goat."

JOE MANN:

Precisely— I'm a self-made man, and my lucubrations didn't include the expressive study of slang.

(R) door bell rings. Lucinda opens door. Enter Jane and Little Joe. Exit Lucinda).

JOE MANN:

Haven't I told you to keep away from here.

JANE, defiantly:

Do you want me to keep your secret? Or not?

LITTLE JOE, balancing himself on edge of chair:

Look— Look, papa Joe.

JOE MANN takes him down, strokes his hair:

Poor kid— A little parrot repeating its lesson. I have helped you Jane, on account of this child; but it is time to call a halt.

JANE, boldly:

You don't dare. Besides, who's got a better right to help me?

JOE MANN:

I'm flabbergasted! I didn't think that a woman could be such a barefaced liar.

JANE:

I'll give you an option (pause). Give me \$5,000 now, or I'll expose your past life. That would queer your social and your political position. Don't forget why one girl refused to marry you.

JOE MANN *suspects that she really knows his secret, and he is very subdued:*

I— I— don't keep any more in the house, Jane.

JANE:

But you keep bank books and checks.

JOE MANN:

If I give you hush money it won't be by check. Come a few days from now.

JANE:

Give it to me now. I must have it before eight o'clock to-night.

JOE MANN:

Go, now.

JANE *looks desperate:*

Do you promise to have it ready the next time I come?

JOE MANN:

Yes; and go without further parley.

(Exit Jane and little Joe. Joe Mann sits down and is lost in reverie. Re-enter Lucinda with neckties).

JOE MANN:

I've been thinking of you, Linda.

Too—~~hee—e~~— Have You?

JOE MANN:

Yes. Thinking and wondering—

LUCINDA:

This is the first time you've said anything like that to me.

JOE MANN:

I've not had occasion...

LUCINDA *tries to lead up to proposal:*

Occasion! when I've been your constant companion so many years.

JOE MANN:

Twelve years of companionship makes one feel almost as a relative.

LUCINDA:

Constant association is responsible for many marriages.

JOE MANN:

And many divorces— Oh, hum, I should have been a lonely old cove without you, Linda. Ah, it doesn't pay to be a mollosc. If I hadn't been a figurehead, I might have had sons and daughters in my old age. (Looks sad).

LUCINDA *looks encouraged:*

It is never too late to mend.

JOE MANN:

But too late to marry.

LUCINDA:

Oh, I don't know— Matrimony is the only business for which no one is ever old enough to be Oslerized. (She goes across the room to get something. She stands back of Joe's chair and pretends to hug him. She touches his bald head and kisses her hand. Joe brushes off the kiss supposing it is a fly. Lucinda comes back to the table). It would be mighty hard for me to get accustomed to the ways of another man after catering to all your wishes for so many years— No wife could have taken more interest in your home. Oh, well, I seem to be doomed to single blessedness, too.

JOE MANN:

You have been a very reliable housekeeper, Linda— I have been thinking about you and wondering (Lucinda listens eagerly) if you remember the date when I stood in the doorway gazing at that beautiful sunset.

LUCINDA, disappointed:

Sunset! We have so many.

JOE MANN:

That one was so remarkable.

LUCINDA:

I remember now... You exclaimed: "What an optical illusion! privet hedge near the turnpike seems to blend into the ever changing color scheme of that glorious sunset."

JOE MANN:

What was the date?

LUCINDA:

One year ago last month. The—the 29th
JOE MANN rises, paces floor with a measured tread:

After you went in that night, I gazed and gazed—but the Belmont that we see so plainly from here in pleasant weather, was no longer visible to my naked eyes—(sadly); and for the first time realized the loneliness of single blessedness.

LUCINDA looks encouraged:

(Aside): They never pop the question without beating around the bush. Shall I put all these neckties in your grip?

JOE MANN:

Yes. You know my failings better than any one else does; particularly my failing for a change of necktie.

LUCINDA:

That the only failing you can lay claim to. (Under her breath) but Miss Ruth refused a faultless husband.

JOE MANN, looking into suitcase:

Put in a few more, Lucinda; I may need them. I haven't the slightest idea how long I shall be gone. Let me see... Where was I at?

LUCINDA, eagerly

You were saying something about single blessedness—And I thought that marriage should be made compulsory.

JOE MANN:

Oh, yes... Then I threw myself on the rustic bench, and said myself: "Somewhere in this wide world I have a sister." (Lucinda looks crestfallen).

LUCINDA, under her breath:

A sister!

JOE MANN:

It has taken until now... One year ago last month, to locate her. That's where I'm going. I sat here thinking about you and wondering whether you would be afraid to stay alone in this big house while I was away.

LUCINDA, in a disgruntled aside:

How solicitous he is!

JOE MANN:

It is so near the turnpike.

LUCINDA:

No. I'm not afraid.

JOE MANN, reflectively:

I can imagine how surprised Mina will be to see me after a lapse of thirty years. I wonder how she and the children will look—if she has any.

(Lucinda casts an occasional glance at Joe as she throws the pajamas and neckties into the suitcase).

JOE MANN, still musing:

Well, I owe her something for having been unwittingly instrumental in my becoming a self-made man. If she hadn't twitted me of lack of initiative, and hadn't told me that I'd never amount to anything, I shouldn't have thought of leaving home as I did.

LUCINDA:

Well, I guess my goose is cooked.

Exit Lucinda. Re-enter Lucinda with goose on a platter).

JOE MANN:

Cooked to a turn. If ever a woman could reach a man's heart through his stomach, you certainly have the recipe, Lucinda.

(Lucinda looks disgruntled and lets the goose slide off the platter).

—Curtain—

ACT II.

Two days have elapsed since Act I.

(Mina Larson's home is in Canada, in the Province of Quebec. Her nearest neighbors, on the lonely stretch of land, are the kind hearted, picturesque, French Canadian peasants. Mina is sitting at the supper table glancing over a newspaper; she lays it down and pours the tea. Omega, the baby, is sitting in a high chair. Alpha, who is doing embroidery, lays down her work and sits down to supper. Beta sits at a distance of the table manicuring her nails. Mina picks up the paper after pouring the tea.)

MINA:

Here's the same ad I see in the other New York newspaper, when I got the idea, first off, to send you girls to Miss Elie's school for a year... After I noticed all the millionaire tourists taking such a shine to you, Alpha.

ALPHA:

Let me see it, maw. (Mina hands newspaper to Alpha).

BETA:

We wouldn't stood much chance to marry millionaires if Miss Merrill hadn't put that piece in the newspapers when she went back to Boston: about the turtles leaving their tracks on the sand thousands of years ago, before it hardened into stone.

MINA:

She said it paid to advertise— But I think it was Providence that sent her here for what she called "local color." I don't know what would have become of us only for that story. (Sighs) We were so hard up But I'll soon be able to send you to boarding school now.

ALPHA, sipping tea, in her affected way:

Maw, Gamma won't never learn. She's too paresseuse d'esprit.

MINA, dumfounded:

I don't know where you ketch on to such big words!

BETA cranes her neck and looks at Alpha admiringly:

Maw, it's an education to live in the house with Alpha, and I don't see as it's any use going to boarding school— It would be a waste of money.

(Mina sits in deep thought holding the cup of tea in her hand.)

GAMMA, entering:

Manicuring your nails again, Beta Larson.

BETA throws the manicure set on the floor. Sits down to supper:

What do you think Miss Merrill sent me this miniature set for— to look at?

GAMMA:

Hard'y— That would be a greater example of New England thrift than having changed our names to Alpha, Beta and Gamma, to save her breath. (She goes to Mina and kisses her). Worrying again... It's five years since paw was drowned, and you worry and cry as if it had happened yesterday. Here's a newspaper that one of the tourists left in the restaurant. Read, and keep your mind off your troubles. Now, be a good, obedient, little mother.

MINA:

This's another New York paper. "The Globe", that includes Canada; so I'm about as near to the United States now as I ever expected to be— Every time that I lay my hands on an American newspaper, I have a feeling that some day I may get a clue to poor Joe. (She sighs).

BETA, to Alpha:

Trouble number two.

MINA:

It's thirty years... that she disappeared as mysteriously as if the earth had opened and swallowed her up.

GAMMA, *trying on her new dress*:

Is that what you were thinking about?

MINA, *rising*:

If I hadn't been chasing a clue we got— I wouldn't have met and married your paw. Well, I should be thankful that I didn't choose to go to Stockholm with him instead of starting emigration to Canada. (She sighs).

ALPHA, *rising, says affectedly*:

When I marry a millionaire, I'll include your Wisconsin home town in my wedding trip itinerary.

GAMMA:

Where'd you pick up that big one? "Itinerary". If it's a dog, advertise it and get the reward. Business is falling off in the restaurant. We've got to make a living some day.

ALPHA, *affectedly, as she goes upstairs*:

You'll never learn to speak proper from the tourists. Your environment is too limited.

GAMMA:

Tee-hee—o— Pleasure turn up the hem of my dress. (She walks around) It's the right length now with a facing.

MINA:

Turn around.

GAMMA *pricks her finger smoothing down her dress*: Quick! make it long.

MINA, *measuring*:

It's as long as Alpha's.

(Beta rises from table and resumes manicuring. She takes a cup of water to soak her nails).

GAMMA:

It's too short.

MINA:

It will be time enough for you to wear long dresses when Alpha and Beta's married off.

GAMMA:

Do you suppose I want to be an old maid? Who's going to ask a girl to get married when she's dressed like a baby? (She steps out of the corner) dress and leaves it on the floor). Boo-oo-o—. (She goes and sits in the corner).

BETA:

Crying again. Big boob.

MINA:

Joe was just like her about clothes. (Mina clears off table and sighs). Poor Joe. (Mina goes to stairs). Alpha, come down and write a note to the doctor.

ALPHA *comes down dressed in her best gown*:

What for, maw?

MINA:

To tell him that you're better and not threatened with pneumonia. The road's so muddy after last night's rain, he'd likely break his horse's leg as he did when he came to set old Mother Charette's arm.

ALPHA:

Dr. Mathurin never diagonalises a case right.

GAMMA:

If he made a straight guess, the chances are that he'd call once, and his bill would be as long as my new dress. Boo-oo-o. Marie Leblanc is only fifteen, and she got married as soon as she put on a long dress.

(A peasant youth comes in with two pails suspended from a yoke on his shoulders. He deposits the pails on the banc de seau, then, hitching the empty ones on the yoke, he goes out. Enter Madame Bougie, a neighbor, to borrow a bedstead).

MADAME BOUGIE:

You must excuse me, M'me Larson; you must excuse me if I ax to lend de bedstead again. My modair-in-law she come to visits from Quebec. You must excuse me, if I don't lack to make her sleep in de chauffaw.

MINA:

You may have anything that you need, Mrs. Bougie. You were so kind and sympathetic when poor Larson died. (She wipes her eyes on the corner of her apron). I'll ask the carpenter to go up for it. (Exit Mina. Re-enter Mina and the carpenter). Gamma, go up and tell him to put the featherbed on the floor. It won't hurt you girls to sleep on the floor for a night or two.

ALPHA, searching for note paper. Affectedly:

It is so hard to be without a private secretary.

MADAME BOUGIE:

You must excuse me for all de trouble, M'me Larson.

MINA:

Dont mention it— I can never repay you for all your kindness. (She wipes her eyes on the corner of her apron. Exit carpenter with bedstead).

MADAME BOUGIE snivels as they go toward the door:

You was kind, too, when my first modair-in-law she die.

Exit Madame Bougie and Mina).

ALPHA, writing laboriously:

(Aloud): dear doctor I take my pen in hand to write hoping this will find you as it leaves me at (yells). How do you spell present, maw?

(Gamma puts her hands over her ears. Beta throws the manicure set on the floor and goes out).

GAMMA:

Such a yell! (Bending over Alpha's shoulder). I wouldn't begin that that way. He thinks you're a very sick girl, and—

ALPHA yells:

Maw— make Gamma stop casting reflections on me. I guess I know how to write a letter. With my command of the English language!

GAMMA, still bending over Alpha's shoulder:

You used a small I, and a small D. (Laughs). You haven't any use for capital; but Beta isn't at all averse to it— She use capitals for every other word and capital for chewing gum.

(Enter Beta with her hat on).

BETA:

I'm glad maw's sending word to the doctor not to call. There ain't much of paw's insurance money left for a rainy day. (She goes to picture and takes money from back of frame). Maw was so bent on giving him a decent funeral. The flowers alone cost more 'n fifteen dollars. And the dollar the doctor got last night was just thrown away. (She counts money) There's only twenty-three dollars left.

ALPHA:

Maw's so queer and lachrymose since paw died.

BETA:

My, I wish I could catch on like you! What does lachrymose mean?

GAMMA:

If it isn't lockjaw; it's enough to give it.

BETA:

Come down to the turtle tracks.

(Alpha addresses several envelopes, examines each and tears it up).

ALPHA:

When I finish this letter.

GAMMA:

Maw forbid you to go to the turtle tracks.

BETA:

Please mind your own business, Gamma Larson. We ain't common like you, speaking to everybody 'round this neighborhood like they was in our station.

ALPHA:

We choose our company.

(Enter Mina with pajamas and night cap).

MINA:

Come and put on your night cap and your night drawers, Omega.

(Mina goes to table where Omega is nodding as if overcome with sleep and takes her from the high chair).

GAMMA:

Come, maw's baby is so sleepy.

OMEGA *whines*:

I don't want to go to bed.

(Alpha seals her letter).

MINA:

Beta, open the chauffaw... Baby's going to sleep in the chauffaw until I'm ready to go to bed.

Beta, open the chauffaw— Baby's going to sleep in the chauffaw

BETA:

Here comes the habitaw... that dear friend of yours.

GAMMA:

Moise. Oh, I guess he's just as dear to you as he is to me.

MINA:

Stop your quarrelling now, and go to fighting.

(Beta rushes to chauffaw and shuts it).

BETA:

Omega, go to bed in the attic... Moise's going to sit on the chauffaw to make love to Gamma.

(Omega goes upstairs. Enter Moise).

GAMMA, *affably*:

We haven't seen you for a whole week. Won't you sit down? Let me take you hat.

MOISE, *is a very bashful youth*:

No, I tank you vair much, Miss Gamin— Will you lend de baudet?

GAMMA:

Moise wants to borrow the baudet, maw.

MOISE:

For la mère. For de compagnie.

GAMMA:

Oh, your mother has company?

MINA *hesitates*:

Well—er, I lent the beistead to Mrs Bougie, and—

GAMMA:

Oh, let him have i — You can sleep in the chauffaw with Omega.

MINA:

Well..

GAMMA:

Run up and get it before maw changes her mind.

(Moise goes upstairs and comes down with the baudet. Mina opens it and examine the screws).

MINA:

It's all right for any any one that isn't very heavy.

MOISE:

I tank you vair much, M'me Larson. (Exit Moise).

GAMMA *puts on her hat*:

Come Delta (to dog); come and see how old Mrs. Charette is getting along. (She puts cake in napkin).

BETA:

Hu: y up, Alpha. (Alpha and Beta go to next room).

MINA: *ops picking up sewing*:

Take this glass of jelly over, and don't hurry back. I don't think any more tourists will be along to-day. I'll wait on them if any one comes. (Enter neighbors who are going to a party. One woman carrying a violin).

IN CHORUS:

How do you do Mrs. Larson? We want Alpha, Beta and Gamma to come to Mam'selle Bonchamps's party. It's only a little surprise party.

BETA and ALPHA, coming in:

Oh, and Elise is going to dance.

(Old Catrinette begins to play the violin).

BETA:

Oh, Elise, won't you dance for maw? She has never seen you dance.

PIERRE:

Sure... we'll all dance for Mrs. Larson. Go ahead, Catrinette. (He picks up the stove and put it in the corner. They all laugh).

MINA:

Isn't Pierre, the lad.

BELA, a down East yankee:

I'll call off.

JEAN:

Go ahead, Bela, you down East yankee.

BELA:

All hands around, balance your corners, catches, swing your partners, whee... (He grabs Mina and makes her join in the dance).

ALPHA:

Oh, Elise, won't you dance that beautiful dance, for maw? (Elise dances).

MINA:

I never thought that it was possible for any one to dance like that. If we had a theatre here, you could be what Alpha calls a primer-dance use.

(They exit and Mina continues to pick up sewing and clothes).

OMEGA, coming downstairs:

I'm afraid, maw.

MINA, picking up dress and manicure set:

I do all the work myself to keep their hands white, in case they should marry millionaires, and they can't even pick up their clothes... Go and get the broom for maw.

OMEGA, giving her the cedar broom used by peasants:

Here it is!

MINA:

Run and get the pluma for maw.

OMEGA:

Here it is!

MINA:

Put it on the chauffaw— Now, go back to bed.

OMEGA, whining:

I'm afraid to sleep in the dark.

MINA:

Come— I'll light the candle so you can see to sleep. (They go upstairs).

(There is a knock at the door while Mina is upstairs. She comes down and begins to sleep, holding the pluma at the top of the broom, as it is used by the peasants. Another knock at the door).

MINA:

Come in...

(Enter Joe Mann).

JOE MANN:

Mina! I should have recognized your voice among a thousand. (Looks at her) But not your face, although you have all the Mann features.

MINA:

You have the advantage of me, sir— I can't place you, if I've ever met you.

JOE MANN, embracing her:

Don't you remember me?

MINA, struggling to free herself:

Let go of me, sir... You've made a mistake.

JOE MANN:

No, I've not— Won't you let me be a lover to you?

(Mina with broomstick at right angle, resents the proposal).

MINA:

How dare you ask me such a question? (Weeps) And poor Larsen hardly cold in his grave. Clear out of here! (She shooes Joe with the broomstick. Joe jumps back and does some skirmishing).

JOE MANN, *pulling off his coat*:

Hold on— Hold on! There's something about a leopard not changing its spots. But I can wear pants— This scar may refresh your memory. How I yelled blue murder when that pot of boiling coffee got in its work. Is it any wonder I took to pants? How could I wear a dress with a southern exposure V shape down the back.

MINA, *adjusting her spectacles*:

Well, you're the kid— (Whirling Joe around) I never see a girl so crazy for clothes; and you'll have 'em, even if they're men's clothes. You look as nice as a millionaire.

JOE MANN *laughs*:

Is it any wonder that marriage is a failure— They always judge us from the outside. Why don't you laugh at my predicament?

MINA:

I don't giggle any more. I haven't laughed much the last five years. But why did you do that?

JOE MANN:

It wasn't entirely a matter of choice. I hope, Mina, that you have not found out how hard it is for a pretty young girl to be thrown upon her own resources— Oh, I'm a Jonah, either way. (Finishing readjusting collar and tie). I might have been decked in ropes of pearls in my youth. Men are no pikers when they see a pretty face. But, Mina... Father and Mother?

MINA:

Father was very old, and Mother... (She wipes her eyes).

JOE MANN:

I understand, Mina.

MINA:

Sit down and tell me all about yourself. (With a look of admiration) No one'd ever suspect.

JOE MANN:

It wasn't easy to get used to these togs. Oh, hum—it's a long story. To be brief, I reached Chicago by laps and relays of dishwashing— New York was my objective point— After my experience in the windy city, the metropolis frightened me out of my senses—it wasn't what it is to-day, either— I did a little shopping on Grand Street—went to a boarding house on Rutgers place—left the next morning at an unseemly early hour, and felt very manly in my brand new trousers and pea-jacket; but when I saw men going to work, I felt so conscious of my girlish walk that I took to the tall timber of Brooklyn Bridge and Westoned it— Gad, but I was tired as I waddled in to a Greenpoint store at the gait of a clodhopper— I can almost feel it in my bones now— My vanity is innate—that was the only part of me that wasn't all in when I selected a necktie to furbish up my vanity toilet— Fortunately, the bulls didn't have the freedom of Greenpoint streets. (Pulls out bright red necktie from inside pocket). This was my mascot! Within an hour I was heating rivets in a boiler shop. (Lights cigar) Then I learned to smoke.

MINA:

To smoke!

JOE MANN:

Yep— to get rid of the remnant of girlish feeling. Brace up! Also steeled myself to take a nip. (Mina looks distressed and sighs. Joe rises, sits on edge of table) Oh, I've played the game— Fell off the water wagon—dabbled in every game of chance—except matrimony. Although after acquiring a competence I cast dice at Hymen's altar, also.

MINA, mystified:

What kind of a game is that?

JOE MANN:

The game that the lawyers got us out of after the law has got one over— I asked a girl to marry me to save her reputation because she had been too friendly with me. But she turned me down for the same reason that women aren't allowed to vote.

MINA:

I suppose she didn't want statistics to show that more women than men marry. Were you out of your mind?

JOE MANN:

Nope— I craved companionship. She needed financial aid— But she wanted to marry a man.

MINA:

Wasn't that just like a woman.

JOE MANN:

No platonic love for her— By the way, have you any children?

MINA:

A few— I'll call them.

JOE MANN:

Now... this secret is between you and me. (Mina looks disappointed) Let them draw their own conclusion. I'm the only woman in the flat who is not taxed without representation, and I don't want to lose my pants.

(Exit Mina. Joe looks out of window).

JOE MANN, under his breath:

By, Jove! It's the same old place, Turtle Tracks.

MINA, outside, calls in shrill voice:

Alpha— Beta— Gamma— Delta—

JOE MANN, inside, translates:

A, B, C, D.

(Omega steals downstairs, looks frightened, and goes out).

MINA:

Go ask to bed, Omega. Maw's coming right in.

JOE MANN looks alarmed:

"Omega!" I wonder if she has utilized all the better of the Greek alphabet? No race suicide here.

MINA, outside:

Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta. Hurry up.

(Re-enter Mina with children and dog).

JOE MANN, hurriedly:

Why, I came here to see the turtle tracks five years ago, the oldest November within the memory of man.

MINA:

November—that was one month before poor Larson was drowned. (She weeps gently).

JOE MANN:

What are you crying for?

MINA:

He was such a moral man.

JOE MANN:

I wouldn't cry for that. (Joe takes long strides, goes way back and sits down).

MINA:

Why do you go way back and sit down? This's Alpha, Joe.

JOE MANN, rising:

Come and kiss your uncle, Alpha.

ALPHA, astonished:

Uncle?

(Mina turns aside to suppress a smile).

JOE MANN:

Don't be bashful.

(Beta and Gamma look surprised, crane necks).

ALPHA:

Uncle? (Recovers her self possession, shakes hands, says affectedly)
Pleased to meet you. I've heard so much about you that I feel as
if I'd known you all my life.

JOE MANN:

Well, how are you?

(When Alpha speaks Mina and Beta come forward, crane necks, and
look at her admiringly).

ALPHA:

I'm much better. I don't feel so lachrymical since the pressure on
the larynx has subsided to the lower end of the oesophagus— I mean
oesophagus, giving greater scope and vibration to my voice.

JOE MANN:

H'm— I should have included anatomy in my night studies.

MINA:

Beta, Gamma and Omega.

BETA, shaking hands:

Pleased to meet you, I've heard so much about you that I feel as
if I'd known you all my life.

GAMMA doesn't follow the old formula:

I didn't expect to see you (makes gesture) like this.

(Alpha and Beta stand aside sizing up Joe's clothes, and whispering)

JOE MANN, to Gamma:

You're on kiddo. (Puts finger to lips to caution her).

ALPHA:

Are you puzzled?

BETA:

Don't my face tell the story.

OMEGA:

Is that Joe, maw?

JOE MANN, kissing Omega:

Uncle Joe.

BETA:

Maybe maw's nutty from so much crying.

JOE MANN:

Bring on the rest of the twenty-six.

MINA:

Twenty-six?

OMEGA:

This's Delta, Uncle Joe.

JOE MANN:

Only one quadruped.

MINA, ruminates while Joe pats Delta:

I lent the bedstead and the bandet— You look awful tired, Joe. I'll
have to make you sleep down here with Omega, in the chauffaw.

JOE MANN stops patting Delta suddenly. Straightens up astonished:

The chauffeur! Not on your life.

MINA, equally surprised:

Why not?

JOE MANN:

I'd prefer the garage.

MINA:

What's the garage?

JOE MANN:

I see— You married a chauffeur without a garage.

MINA, puzzled:

Married a chauffaw? (Weeps) Poor Larson wasn't a chauffaw— He
was a man. Who ever heard of marrying a chauffaw.

JOE MANN:

Girls, and rich ones, too, marry their chauffeurs.

ALPHA, to Beta:

If maw's nutty Joe's dippy.

MINA:

Stop your fooling.

JOE MANN:

Now, Mina, I draw the line at the chauffeur.

MINA:

Why?

JOE MANN:

On the ground that it might degrade and incriminate me.

MINA:

If it don't degrade me, it won't degrade you.

JOE MANN:

That's a matter of opinion— I'm astonished at the suggestion, even. Have you forgotten— (looks toward girls). Oh, dear, oh, dear— What's the use—

MINA:

What's the use getting so excited? I know it's low, but it's the style here.

GAMMA:

Uncle (winks) Joe, that won't make any difference to the chauffeur.

JOE MANN:

What! Then also, Brutus— The chauffeur needn't be consulted.

MINA:

My, but you're stuck up... I'll send for the bedstead, my neighbor will have to make her mother-in-law sleep IN the chauffeur.

JOE MANN:

Sleep IN the chauffeur exceeds the speed limit. (Measuring the huche) No garage; so my choice has narrowed down to the set tub. It's short; but I prefer it to sleeping with the chauffeur.

MINA:

That's the huche, Joe. I mix the bread in that.

JOE MANN:

Great! My new flats would sell like hot cakes by installing set bread mixers and combination beds. (Taking off cover) Where's the mixer?

MINA, opens chauffeur:

Try the chauffeur— It's more comfortable than sleeping on the floor in the attic.

JOE MANN:

I'll be jiggered! Is that what you call a chauffeur in this benighted town?

MINA:

Chauffeur.

JOE MANN:

Say that again?

MINA:

Chauffeur.

JOE MANN:

Chauf-aww! That must be pigeon French for bunk. (Tickles Mina with cedar broom) Wouldn't this tickler have gladdened the hearts of Conyites during the Mardi-Gras.

MINA:

Poor Larson. He made all our cedar brooms. (Weeps gently).

JOE MANN:

They have to die to be idealized; when they live they are divorced.

MINA:

There's no divorce in this country.

JOE MANN:

No blessing in disguise— Everybody's doing it via Reno, eh?

MINA:

Oh, my— I was so surprised to see you that I nearly forgot my manners. (Spreading table cloth on table) You must be starved.

JOE MANN:

Watch me do justice to some good home cooking.

MINA, scurrying around:

Isn't that just like a man! (Joe looks pleased. Mina turns around and looks at Joe) I declare, no one'd ever suspect—

JOE MANN, glancing toward the girls:

H'm-h'm-h'm Mina! I'm no exception. They're all alike on the outside.

ALPHA:

If you are an epicure; you'll have a gastronomic treat. (Beta cranes her neck. Mina stops suddenly. They stand gazing with admiration at Alpha as she speaks.) For maw is a great artist in culinary art.

BETA, to Mina:

It'll be an education for Joe to be in the house with Alpha. She's the grand conversationist.

(Exit girls glancing back surreptitiously).

JOE MANN:

Have you good schools here?

MINA:

Sit right down here. (She puts jumbo cup and saucer on table).

JOE MANN:

Gamma couldn't read my business card when I came to your restaurant five years ago, she said: "I'll give it to paw, he knows how to read."

MINA, putting generous portions on side dishes:

We couldn't learn Gamma. Alpha and Beta's different. They want to be somebody; they're proud and perky; they want to marry millionaires. Beta says, "Maw where'd you get that one? She isn't one of us. She seems to care only for habitaws."

JOE MANN, sampling each dish:

Noblesse oblige— When I was a contractor I met hod carriers who were to the manor born despite disadvantages— Damn pity that girl hasn't been educated.

MINA:

This's ragout Bélaire.

JOE MANN:

Aren't you dispensing your hospitality with a heavy hand?

MINA:

I hope you'll be able to make out a meal.

JOE MANN:

Please don't look at me with that air of deference that women had for male attire before the Feminist Movement.

MINA:

You're just like a man. (Joe looks pleased). Now, Johanna—

JOE MANN looks around furtively:

Sssh—

JOE MANN:

Let me give you this last hot tamale? (Scrutinizing Joe's plate) You haven't tasted the spaghetti. I was afraid you wouldn't make out a meal.

JOE MANN:

Don't worry— No miscellaneous foreign collection ever failed to make a hit with Americans. This ragout Blair has goulash beaten a— My, but this butter is strong! (Makes motion of rising). It will take a Sandow to keep me down if I eat it.

MINA:

Poor Larson—He must have had a warning of his death, when he said: "When I'm dead, get this kind of butter, the stronger it is the longer it will last." Let me give you some molasses pie?

JOE MANN:

No; but if you will give me a pound of sugar for this demi-tasse.

MINA:

I declare, I didn't intend to give you that demijohn, we used that jumbo cup and saucer for a sign in the restaurant. (Weeps) Poor Larson bought it. It reminds me of when he was alive— But I gave him a

funeral that would have made his heart feel good if he could have seen it. That was the last thing I could do for him. (Weeps gently).

JOE MANN rises from table, lights cigar:

See here— My interests have always been with the living. Let's speak of something more cheerful. (Mina begins to clear off table) What can we do to give the girls some advantages they have missed? Sit down and let's talk it over.

MINA:

It's hard to teach an old dog new tricks. I haven't done much sitting in my life.

JOE MANN:

Well, lie down on the chauffaw! I'll put my coat under your head.

MINA, throwing herself on the chauffaw:

Oh—h-u-m—

JOE MANN:

We have some good schools on Long Island—

(Joe Mann stops suddenly when Mina begins to snore like a saw mill in full blast. Joe shakes her as Gamma and Omega come in and sit down on the chauffaw. Mina sits up and nods approval. Joe continues to speak. Alpha and Beta come in whispering and casting surreptitious glances at Joe. Gamma and Omega listen attentively and look delighted). ALPHA, in her affected way, answers Beta's whispered question:

By inverse ratio, an answer, to your hypothetical question, would require some hetero-suggestion. (Beta looks awed).

BETA:

My, but you can sling on the bugs with big words. Why didn't you say that to Joe? (She cranes her neck to look at Joe).

JOE MANN, rising:

Now that it's all settled, I'd like to turn in. I'm as sleepy as a cat.

MINA:

Open the chauffaw, Gamma.

JOE MANN looks in to suitcase, takes out silk pajamas. Soliloquizes:

Its hard to decide whether the pink or the blue is more becoming to my tired style of beauty. (He steps in to the other room and returns prepared for bed).

(Alpha, Beta and Omega go upstairs).

GAMMA, going upstairs:

Good night, Uncle (winks) Joe— Sleep tight.

JOE MANN, tumbles in to chauffaw head first:

This's the durned thing to get into.

MINA, lights candle, puts it on table. Going upstairs:

How can you sleep without a night cap?

JOE MANN, getting out of chauffaw:

I forgot my night cap. (Opens suitcase, drinks from flask). Now for a good snooze. (With a snore and a jump, Joe is out of the chauffaw. Soliloquizes): Fleas! Fleas! Bing, Bang! (Tries to make bed on chaise, falls off) Ugh! (Tries to make bed on huche) Ugh! there's no use. They follow me; they think I'm good pickings. (Daylight begins to stream in. Joe begins to dress).

MINA, coming downstairs:

Dear me! you get up as early as if you were a man.

JOE MANN, motioning toward girls upstairs:

Sssh— Great Scott! Fleas are indigenous to this soil. I didn't get a wink of sleep. Talk about Jersey mosquitoes! Goosh—

MINA, surprised:

You don't say! I thought you'd be like Miss Merrill. She was just one of us. I never see anyone so hardened— She said she kept her mind over the matter and didn't feel them.

JOE MANN chuckles:

We may as well start this morning.

MINA:

This morning! Now isn't that just like a man. (Joe looks pleased).

Always in a hurry. We can't go kiting off this morning, and all this stuff to pack. I'll make breakfast, first off.

JOE MANN:

Cut out the cats.

MINA:

That shows you're a woman.

(Alpha and Beta are coming downstairs. Joe fears they have heard).

JOE MANN:

Mina! I'd have to bang your head to make your remember—

ALPHA, *frightened*:

They're having a fight.

BETA, *crouching in fear*:

I guess she's a man. Like paw on the fight. Come back upstairs.

JOE MANN:

Come right down and hustle— Tear up an old red skirt, that one there on the mixless mixer, while I finish dressing. I'll put up the red flag. It won't take long to auction off—

MINA:

No one'd ever think you a man or—

JOE MANN:

Mina!

Or o woman— What if you had to lose three weeks sleep with a dozen children all sick with measles, and—

JOE MANN, *reflectively*:

No doubt my mind would be even more fossilized than yours. But never mind, you will soon be in the land of milk and honey and high cost of living.

GAMMA comes downstairs *singing*:

I'm so happy. (She dances around).

JOE MANN:

You'll be happier when you taste Lucinda's cooking. She has lived with F. I. F's, and her cooking—

MINA:

F. I. F's?

JOE MANN:

First Irish Families, of course.

BETA, *who is always awed*:

My, what'll we say?

MINA:

What do we usually say when we're introduced?

JOE MANN *groans*:

Gad, that old-fashioned formula. I see myself with another breach of promise case on my hands at the start. Give me that flag. (Exit Joe with red flag. Re-enter Joe). Can you get traveling suits in this town?

MINA:

Yes.

JOE MANN, *counting money*:

Here's six hundred dollars. (Touching widow's weeds) And leave off that first aid to a fish hook.

MINA and GIRLS *gasp*:

S-i-x h-u-n-d-r-e-d d-o-l-l-a-r-s.

JOE MANN:

Get pretty hats. Something, say, for about \$40 a piece.

GAMMA:

There's nothing in Turtle Tracks worth mor'n \$2.98 cents.

BETA:

But if they see the American money; they'll ask as much as \$90.

JOE MANN:

For the \$2.98 hats?

BETA:

Sure.

JOE MANN:

They've got our number-- Get a gait on, and hurry back. (Looks at time table) We must catch that 12-30 express. (I hardly know where to begin this rummage sale— Oh, yes. That tickler. What am I offered for— Start it, ladies and gentlemen.

—Curtain—

ACT III.

The same as Act I.

Two days have elapsed since Act II.

Living room in Joe Mann's home on Long Island.

Lucinda at telephone— Door bell rings, but she doesn't hear.
LUCINDA, at 'phone:

Yes. I understand, although it's rather hard to take deportment lessons by 'phone— I'll try it once more.—Yes, I'll walk in with head erect and extend my hand courteously as if welcoming a guest. Hold the wire. (She goes through the performance, then goes to 'phone). I do it to perfection. (She listens) Of course—I'm sorry to discontinue— But my plans are so uncertain now that Mr. Mann has located his sister— I haven't a doubt that he will be nominated for the Presidency—Oh, yes as his wife I should need all these lessons in deportment to enable me to fill the position of First Lady of the land.

(The bell has stopped ringing. Lucinda with the receiver at her ear is listening intently when some one begins to knock at the back door. Lucinda is too preoccupied to hear).

LUCINDA:

If she isn't a highbrow— There is a possibility that she may not object to his marrying a housekeeper— Fifty dollars is a lot of money for lessons in etiquette that I may not have use for now— I will send a check for the amount. Good bye.

(Lucinda hangs up receiver and goes to mirror. She scans her face and soliloquizes).

LUCINDA:

I've worried enough the last two days to give me a hundred wrinkles (She stands in front of mirror smearing her face with creme marquise. Jane enters and stands gazing at her rubbing in the creme. Lucinda looks around).

LUCINDA:

What! here again, Jane? And you came in without knocking— You silly creature! (Lucinda tries to hide creme marquise).

JANE:

I never sneak in anywhere without knocking. (She sits down).

LUCINDA:

I'm not hard of hearing.

JANE:

No; but you're too busy rejuvenating to hear if a cyclone struck the house. My, but you're fat! This's the first time I've seen you without a corset. What's happened that you're getting so slack? Say, ain't you afraid the old boy'll come in and see you doing that down here? (Lucinda wipes the creme marquise off her face and doesn't heed). Don't mind me, go on with the message. Soon's I go to Doblines, I'm going to get some of that. (She reads label) Creme Marquise—I need to begin the rejuvenating act, too;

LUCINDA:

It takes more than creme marquise to rejuvenate a damaged reputation, Jane.

JANE (Naches):

Lucinda, I thought you different than other women.

LUCINDA:

I'm sorry that I didn't bridle my tongue—Even the church are beginning to revise the story of Magdalen. I suppose I might have been unfortunate, too, if I hadn't had the luck to work for good men. But that was more hit than good wit. Mr. Mann is the most modest one I ever met, though.

JANE:

Oh, well, you're lucky— A woman of my experience knows to what lengths a bad man will go to drive a bargain for a woman's soul. Even good men will say: A man will go as far as a girl will let him and no further. But it's a lie. It's a lie. Immorality isn't the only crime, though. (Reflectively) Yes, I'm a hardened, bad woman. Who wouldn't be in my place— I feel like ending it all.

LUCINDA:

Now don't talk like that— Women may yet have their day at ruling the world. Scientists are the modern miracle men. Stranger things have happened than the discovery of an elixir of life to take the place of father. Cheer up. You were unfortunate in meeting the wrong class. I know one virtuous man, and there are others.

(Jane who has never met a virtuous man is startled).

JANE:

Who is he?

LUCINDA:

Mr. Joe Mann.

JANE, *flashes*:

JANE, *in her tough way*:

Say, you startled me out of a year's growth— Don't you know that they all say that about their finances. It's the so-called good girl's stock phrase. Where's the G. O. P.? I've come for the money that he promised me.

LUCINDA:

You know that you are blackmailing him. Why do you do it?

JANE:

You wouldn't believe me if I told you— No one believes the truth. Oh, well, Joe Mann called me a vampire, but there's not one of them that I wouldn't bleed under the circumstances. (She walks around, and says reflectively) American men are different.

LUCINDA, *relieved of suspicion*:

He isn't an American, then— Thank God.

JANE:

I didn't say that. I said, American men are different.

LUCINDA:

Who is he, Jane?

JANE:

No names mentioned, but look where I'm looking.

(Lucinda's eyes follow Jane's roving glances).

JANE, *hears honk of auto, and looks out*:

Tom Corey's auto, and the Grand Old Party.

LUCINDA, *peeking out*:

Mr. Mann! I didn't expect him so soon.

JANE:

Where'd Tom get the rubes. If they ain't getting out here. Tom looks mashed on the short dress. I admire his taste. A man rated at half a million or more.

LUCINDA:

All earned by the sweat of his brow. (She rushes around picking up paraphernalia, speaking faster) a humanitarian dyed in the wool, fifty-six inches wide, warranted not to fade, rip, tear or ravel—Hurry— Jane. I don't want them to see me with this regalia on.

JANE:

Hurry nothing—I'm here to get that money. I've got to have it.

JANE:

Go—He has been more than patient with you. I'm not going to let you annoy him when he has company. Go—

(Lucinda pushes her out (L) door, turns the key, listens, unlocks the door and goes out through diningroom at center of stage. (R) Enter Joe Mann carrying little trunk which he deposits on the piano with cedar broom decorated with neckties as a friendship stick. Alpha, Beta, Mina and Omega come in with Joe Mann. They look around and speak in undertones).

JOE MANN:

I wonder where Lucinda is. (He goes to next room (L) door, calling: Lucinda— Lucinda—

MINA, takes off her bonnet:

I'm almost paralyzed from sitting so long. Oh, here's a broom. I'll limber up.

JOE MANN, re-enters. Takes broom:

Put the brakes on some of your kinetic energy. Lucinda will have a fit if you make any dust here. (Glancing out of window) Tom seems to have staked out his claim— Gamma couldn't do better. He is as clean as he looks.

GAMMA, entering:

Isn't he handsome. Uncle (winks) Joe? He's the loveliest man I've ever met.

BETA, prouetting in front of mirror:

I can see myself full length in this big mirror.

GAMMA:

Who'd have thought three weeks ago that we'd be living in a palace like this. And wearing an engagement ring. It didn't take me long to say, "Barkis is willin'", when Mr. Corey took it off his finger and put it on mine to seal the bargain. He's the loveliest man.

JOE MANN:

That's what they all say. Even about me. (The girls who are now in the secret, look at one another and laugh). What—what are you crying for?

MINA, looking at watch:

Poor Larson—it's four years, eleven months, twenty-five days and three hours since he was found in the river. (She weeps gently). We identified by this watch.

JOE MANN:

You ought to be on the obit. staff of the Punkville Record. Why waste so much salt in tears?

MINA:

HE WAS SUCH A MORAL MAN.

JOE MANN:

(What a fortune she could have made in a side show with such an uncommon bird). Oh, be joyful. There's a different species of lark in this land of the free— Come, be a sport.

GAMMA, hugging Joe:

You look as lovely as a real man.

JOE MANN looks around uneasily:

H'm—h'm—h'm—There seems to be lodestone about the old home.

for—

(R) Enter Lucinda with her hat on).

LUCINDA feigns surprise:

Mr. Mann! I didn't expect to see you so soon; but I'm glad you are home again. (She takes off her hat and lays it on the table).

JOE MANN:

Same here— Lucinda, my ready made family. My sister, Mrs. Larson and her daughters, from Canada.

(Mina who is busy passing her fingers over the furniture for dust, comes up hurriedly and shakes hands).

MINA:

Pleased to meet you. I've heard so much about you that I feel as

If I'd known you all my life. (Joe groans. Lucinda looks delighted)
My sister—er—

JOE MANN:

H'm—h'm—h'm—There seem sto be lodestone about the old home.
LUCINDA looks pleased:

I shall never forget how pleased you were to see me when you came
back from England—Too—too—I really thought he was going to kiss me.

JOE MANN, under his breath:

I haven't mended matters.

MINA:

What would have been the harm.

JOE MANN:

H'm—h'm—h'm—

MINA:

It's all the style in Canada for women to kiss when—

JOE MANN:

My nieces, Alpha—

MINA, fugging at Joe:

Miss Alpha.

JOE MANN doesn't heed:

ALPHA, grasping Lucinda's hand:

Pleased to meet you. I've heard so much about you that I feel as
if I'd known you all my life.

(Joe Mann groans and hangs a cedar broom).

BETA, shakes hands:

Pleased to meet you. I've heard so much about you that I feel as
if I'd known you all my life.

JOE MANN groans:

Another county heard from.

(Mina pulls pluma (wing) out of Lucinda's hat and dusts).

GAMMA doesn't follow the old formula:

How do you do?

(Lucinda picks up her hat stealthily and holds it).

MINA:

Joe's just like a—

JOE MANN:

H'm—h'm—h'm—

MINA:

A man— He made us start off in such a hurry that I didn't have time
to put a pluma in my trunk. But don't worry. I'll get you another one
if I have to send to Canada for it. If I hadn't had poor Larson's little
trunk, I declare, (forgets to say he) she'd made us start without a stitch
of our clothes— Poor Larson. (Weeps gently) HE WAS SUCH A MORAL
MAN.

LUCINDA, casting a glance at Joe:

There are others.

ALPHA:

Traveling so long has got on maw's nerves.

LUCINDA:

I presume you have traveled more and therefore stood the journey
better.

ALPHA, in her most affected way:

Obviously. I have went as far as Saskatchewan, traveling intermit-
tently— I say intermittently advisably— I mean advisedly.

(When Alpha begins to speak, Mina and Beta step forward, crane
necks and look at her admiringly. Lucinda suppresses a smile).

BETA, to Mina:

Now is Lucinda's chance to get an education.

LUCINDA:

That was some travel.

ALPHA:

Some one said I'd traveled as far as Doctor Cook— whoever he is—
but got nearer the North Pole—whatever that is.

(Lucinda smiles and goes out. Beta follows her out).

MINA, looking at piano:

Alpha plays "The Maiden's Prayer". Open it and let her try.

JOE MANN, opens piano. Looks bored:

Oh, hum—

ALPHA, taking off rings and bracelets:

I'll play classical music, first off. (She takes off brooch, turns down the collar of her dress).

JOE MANN, throwing himself in chair:

Do you have to take off all your—

ALPHA:

Only my jewelry. Maw likes The Maiden's Prayer; but we prefer Chopin in Canada.

JOE MANN yawns:

Ah—h—u—m.

(L) Exit Gamma. Alpha begins to play. Joe Mann sits up and begins to take notice, Lucinda looks in with mouth agape).

JOE MANN, jumps up:

Say, she's a musical genius—Are the other musically inclined?

MINA:

Alpha's only a beginner compared to the others. Gamma plays "The Last Rose of Summer" on the fiddle so's you'd almost believe you could see the roses fading and the leaves falling.

JOE MANN:

It's a Strad for her—Where did they get that talent?

MINA:

Everybody's musical in Canada. It seems to be in the air.

JOE MANN, enthusiastically:

I'll see Tom immed. tely—He's on the school committee. He will get them in school without delay. Ran along Alpha and put on some of the new togs we bought this morning. (Exit Alpha) They won't feel so awkward with decent clothes on. When they get some of the hayseed out of their hair; they will pass without much pushing. (Arranging collar and tie) By, Jove! I'll have money to burn when they begin to boom this section. (Brushing hat with sleeve) Then American tradition will crop out—A few worthless dukes and lords with old chateaux's to be repaired. Oh, I'm a good counter part of my countryman—Told them to hurry.

(R) Exit Joe. (L) Enter Alpha, she turns her back to have Mina button her dress. Enter Gamma dressed in new togs).

BETA, rushing in:

You can't guess what I heard about Joe!

ALPHA:

What?

BETA:

Joe's awful land poor, and I guess all the land we'll inherit will be the land this house stands on.

MINA, her hand over her heart:

You gave me such a start—I thought Joe had killed some one.

(Exit Mina holding her hand over her heart. Enter Lucinda; she fumbles in buffet).

JOE MANN, entering:

Put on your hats. Tom's going to take you up to school in his auto.

(Re-enter Mina).

JOE MANN:

Hurry up, Tom's waiting. (Girls rush out to get hats).

MINA:

Always in a hurry, just like a man. (Joe smiles, but—) No one'd ever suspect—

JOE MANN:

Mina! I'm on the verge of nervous prostration.

(Lucinda still fumbling at buffet, looks up. Re-enter girls with hats on. Exit Lucinda).

JOE MANN:

What's that on your hat?

BETA:

The price mark. Who'll ever guess it costs \$30 if I leave the price tag on the inside.

(Reenter Lucinda with vacuum sweeper. She sweeps in front of buffet. Mina looks on).

JOE MANN, taking off price tag:

If you want to wear the price tag on the outside, get hats like this on Grand Street for fifty cents, and label them any old price, instead of patronizing Fifth Ave.—Ready? All aboard for the school house.

(Exit Joe and girls).

MINA:

I declare—it doesn't make a bit of dust. This contrivance will be a help to women when they have to spend so much time voting. I don't see why women want to put such a job on their shoulders.

(Joe Mann enters and stands in pantomime of approval when Lucinda speaks).

LUCINDA:

You don't see why, but I do—What right has anyone to tax my property to build and maintain homes for wayward girls and their foundlings—That would be all right for a HEATHEN country, but a CHRISTIAN country should have no foundlings.

MINA, horrified:

Homes for foundlings are a great charity.

LUCINDA:

You call it charity; but I call any compulsory benevolence enforced tainted philanthropy. We could lessen the crop of illegitimates by putting the tax where it belongs. It would not only be a Christian example to the heathen; but I, and a few others, could get a husband and have children born in wedlock.

MINA:

I've had thirteen.

LUCINDA:

Gracious! Is the potato crop good in Canada?

MINA, laughing:

I know a man who had a family of twenty—Not counting the foundlings.

LUCINDA:

I would refuse to pay taxes if that could restrict the illegitimate birthrate.

JOE MANN:

There's no reason why you shouldn't take the stump, Lucinda.

LUCINDA:

Had I known you were one of the audience, I should have had stage fright.

JOE MANN:

That speech is good as far as it goes; but it doesn't go far enough.

Now—

(R) Enter Alpha, and Beta holding Gamma by the ear).

JOE MANN, surprised:

School isn't out yet—Is it?

BETA:

No; but we're too big to be put in a class with infants to poke fun at us.

(Alpha stands in brown study).

GAMMA:

I didn't care what they said. But I had to come or lose my ear!

JOE MANN:

You will steal the key to education with Alpha is in a brown study.

ALPHA, comes out of brown study:

The idea of putting me in a class with children—With my command of the English language.

GAMMA, with hand over ear:

It hurts. Hoo—oo—o—

MINA looks distressed:

Maybe we ought to have stayed in Turtle Tracks. (With a look of reproach at Joe) We were so well "acclimated."

JOE MANN, pacing floor:

My new liability is beginning to rest heavily.

MINA:

No one'd ever think you a—

JOE MANN:

H'm—h'm—Mina!

MINA:

Getting discouraged so quick. You can't transplant cabbage in a flower pot and make it grow without some trouble.

LUCINDA:

Why not have a tutor come to the house?

JOE MANN:

That's a good suggestion.

(Exit Lucinda with vacuum sweeper. Joe Mann paces floor. Mina and the girls speak in undertones).

LUCINDA, entering:

Now that you have your sister, Mr. Mann, you may be able to dispense with my services. (Under her breath) Absence makes the heart grow fonder.

JOE MANN:

She isn't the kind to resort to blackmail). My family having increased, I am well aware that you will need help.

LUCINDA:

I dare say, Mrs. Larson can take my place with the assistance of a cook and a second girl.

JOE MANN:

You may have a cook, a parlor maid, and a laundress— I'm not taking any chances on having you snapped up. in aternum— Not much.

LUCINDA:

There's not much danger of that at my age — I'm no chicken.

JOE MANN:

If that's the way you feel, stay. How much do you want added to what you are now getting?

LUCINDA:

It isn't a question of money. You have been kind and generous to me.

JOE MANN, patting her shoulder:

Settle down— You know that I have always liked you. (Under his breath) What can I do to keep her. Such a wonderful cook. Yum-yum. LUCINDA, looks enlightened at the words "always liked you":

I suspected it when you discharged Mrs. Graham and gave me full charge I couldn't have done better if I had been Mrs. Joe Mann.

(Mina who has stepped into the next room reenters, and turns aside to smile).

JOE MANN:

I appreciate your services. That is why I intended to make you my—

LUCINDA:

Of course, that alters my decision. I suspected that you intended—

JOE MANN:

I can't make you heir to the full extent of my property now that I've found my next of kin; but you will get a good slice.

LUCINDA:

I'll make a change for a while anyway.

JOE MANN:

That means my death, Lucinda. You know that only the bread and the salt would stay on my stomach when I was in Paris. (Glancing at Mina) Ragout Blair— Ragout Blair. (Lucinda looking at Joe through the corner of her eye).

LUCINDA:

Man and his stomach— It wasn't anything for me to pack my grip and run over to Paris to cook for you and bring you back a well man. And nearly lose my reputation for traveling with a man to whom I wasn't married. The ingratitude of man!

JOE MANN:

I should have been a helpless old cove without you, Linda. You are an honorable and intelligent woman, stay and—

LUCINDA:

Even an honorable woman has rights not to be trifled with.

JOE MANN:

What do you mean?

LUCINDA:

Oh, nothing—nothing.

JOE MANN:

Lucinda! Oh, if I could only tell you.

LUCINDA:

You needn't be bashful. You have known me long enough. But I'm going anyway. (Exit Lucinda).

JOE MANN, to Mina:

If I could only marry her she might stay another month.

MINA:

What need you care if statistics do show that more women than men marry. (Exit Mina).

LUCINDA, entering:

Well, good bye, Mr. Mann. I shall send for my trunks to-morrow.

JOE MANN, embracing her:

Lucinda! I can't live without you— Promise that you will not leave or reveal my past life if I marry you. (Patting her shoulder awkwardly) I know that I'm acting like an old Lothario, although I've had so little practice in the art of love making. (Kisses her) Butter to butter. (He pats her hair).

(Mina and the girls come in and are convulsed with laughter at sight of the tableau).

LUCINDA, with head on Joe's shoulder:

I'm so happy— Of course I can't make a hero of a jailbird, but I can forgive even a crop of wild oats. (Under her breath) To a rich man.

JOE MANN:

It isn't as bad as that— But I can't think of losing my vote.

LUCINDA:

If you are a pardoned felon you can vote. None but the skirts is barred.

(L) Enter Lars, the Swede).

JOE MANN:

Hello, Lars!

MINA faints:

Lars Larson!

(Alpha, Beta and Gamma look as if they had seen a ghost. Lars tries to escape. Joe restrains him. Lucinda gives first aid to Mina. Joe pushes Lars in nearby chair).

JOE MANN:

Stay there you white livered wife deserter. (Snaps handcuffs on Lars).

LARS, struggling:

Let me go, the old woman.

(The house is dark while Lars and Joe struggle. Lars is tied in chair when lights are turned on).

JOE MANN:

I'll show him what he's up against when I've had my luncheon.

MINA:

Don't—he's the father of my children.

JOE MANN:

None of your old-fashioned, mawkish sentiment.

LARS:

I shall have him arrest, the old woman for wear the man's clothes.
Haw—haw—haw—, Meester Yohanna Mann can't fool Lare, the Swede.

LUCINDA:

An old woman?

JOE MANN:

You sneered at our laws and said they were lax, but we have the modern convenience of an alimony club.

LARE:

Haw—haw—haw—, the old woman.

LUCINDA:

He says such foolish things when he is intoxicated.

JOE MANN:

This's the first time I've seen him sober— The gig's up. There's no use trying to bluff. He has told the truth.

LUCINDA, bewildered:

An old woman! The only virtuous man I ever met—is an old woman.

JOE MANN:

I'm sorry I couldn't get away with it until women are enfranchised.

LUCINDA looks suspicious:

Do you see any green in my eye? Don't try to bluff.

JOE MANN:

Mina, tell Lucinda the truth.

MINA:

Didn't she hear it?

(Mina and the girls speak in undertones).

LUCINDA, in utter disgust:

To think that I fell for all that old female Lothario's deceptions
Even trying to inveigle me in to matrimony.

ALPHA, coming forward:

This's an unprecedented occurrence. But he is our father, if you
will release him, we will take him back to Turtle Tracks.

JOE MANN:

Nothing doing.

LUCINDA ruminates:

She has an apology of a husband, anyway. (A knock at the door.
Lucinda casts a look of utter disgust at Joe as she goes to open the door).

(R) Enter Mrs. Strange-Ade and Inez Holland).

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

Mr. Mann, we are delegated by the Woman's Scientific Research Association, the Fatherless Child Scientific Union, The All Rights Reser—

INEZ, impatiently:

Let me speak— I can do it more concisely, and reach the point at issue without preamble.

(This starts a discussion that looks like a woman's squabble and gives the impression of the well known fallacy that women can do nothing without squabbling).

MRS. STRANGE-ADE, puffing out her chest:

Who is the first delegate?

INEZ:

I thought I—

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

You thought—

INEZ:

I know that I—

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

You do—

INEZ:

I certainly think—

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

Why, you should know that I—

INEZ:

Why should I know that you—

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

Because—

INEZ:

Because is no reason—

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

You interrupted, and it isn't polite to speak when—

INEZ:

Indulging in personalities—

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

It—indul—

INEZ:

Why?

MINA, coming forward:

They're going to clinch, see if they don't— (Stepping up to them)

What are you quarrelling about?

MRS. STRANGE-ADE, astonished:

My dear woman! We are not quarrelling. We are merely discussing a question of precedence.

JOE MANN:

These heated discussions are responsible for the saying that women never get along in—

INEZ:

Go on without preamble, and come to the issue without wounding his self-esteem.

MRS. STRANGE-ADM:

I shall not adopt any MEEK, simpering tactics— (She steads herself to be very blunt) Mr. Mann you cannot prevent our bill, if there is any truth—or—or in—or—

JOE MANN:

I am one of you, ladies— How could there be any truth in that story?

LUCINDA, under her breath:

The old woman! (She looks disgruntled).

(Mrs. Strange-Adé and Inez jump to the conclusion that the insinuation is another insult).

MRS. STRANGE-ADE

One of us! What an insulting insinuation! A man of your reputation!

INEZ:

What do you think of that? It is an outrageous insult!

JOE MANN:

My word of honor— There's not a word of truth in the story. It's blackmail.

MRS. STRANGE-ADM

We are open to conviction— But you can't prove it.

JOE MANN:

Oh, you're from Missouri.

INEZ:

We are not men.

JOE MANN:

Same here.

INEZ:

There is always a doubt in man's subconscious mind. Even when he is convinced.

JOE MANN:

True—woman has never been man's equal (aside) as a doubting Thomas.

MRS. STRANGE-ADE, nettled:

Why isn't she man's equal?

LARZ:

Because the man he was created first.

(Mrs. Strange-Adé looks around to locate the voice, and sizes up Larz).

MRS. STRANGE-ADE

Chanteclair has the pip.

JOE MANN, walks around says reflectively:
She isn't his equal but his superior.

MRS. STRANGE-ADAM

Even a man of your reputation recognizes that woman is—

JOE MANN:

Yes, reputation! But there's nothing wrong in my dual personality.

MRS. STRANGE-ADAM

"Dual!" Ah—he admits it.

INEZ:

Give him enough rope and he will hang himself.

MRS. STRANGE-ADAM

The old renegade—Adam.

INEZ:

The woman tempted him.

JOE MANN, in despair:

If I could only get in a word edgewise—

(Lucinda begins to feel sorry for her old employer and tries to excuse Joe's supposed offense, but the palliation is misunderstood by Mrs. Strange-Ad.)

LUCINDA, coming forward:

The poor old woman.

MRS. STRANGE-ADAM

That's a thin alibi for a woman living alone in the house with a man of his reputation. But I tried to shield them, too, until I married my fourth—

LUCINDA, staggering back:

She even questions my character.

MRS. STRANGE-ADAM, to Joe:

You are the man who believes in the fundamental principle that God gave woman the task to bear children when He condemned man to earn the bread by the sweat of his brow; and allowed him the happy privilege to help perpetuate the race, as a reward for being the bread-winner, and yet—

JOE MANN:

The fundamental principle still holds good, but—

MRS. STRANGE-ADAM

And yet, you abuse the privilege and demoralize social laws by giving to the world nameless children, and by squandering the family exchequer on affia—

JOE MANN:

But—but, I'm not married and never had any chil—

MRS. STRANGE-ADAM

Oh, I suppose you never married because supporting a wife is too great a return for helping to perpetuate the race in wedlock.

INEZ, in loud whisper:

Don't forget—he's a man— Humor him.

JOE MANN:

My dear Mrs. Strange-Ad—

MRS. STRANGE-ADAM:

"My dear!" Now don't get gay— You can't bribe me with terms of endearment.

INEZ:

He may not be guilty— Use more diplomacy. Don't antagonize. I flatter him.

MRS. STRANGE-ADAM:

Do you want him to look like Happy Hooligan when he puts on his hat? What did the Angel get? (Dramatically) "From morn to noon he fell, from noon to dewy eve." I haven't his number, but it was some number and some fell from Heaven to Chicago.

(Joe Mann who has been opening and shutting his mouth trying to get in a word, invokes Mina).

JOE MANN:

For the love of Mike— Tell her who I am, Minn.

MINA:

I seem to be the star witness— My brother Joe is my sister Johanna in private life.

INEZ:

What?

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

What do you mean?

JOE MANN:

Dual personality runs in the family— I am Johanna Mann. My sister thought she was a sad widow; she came here and found that— Now she's a grass widow.

INEZ and MRS. STRANGE-ADE, *giggling*:

And we thought he was such a lovely man.

MRS. STRANGE-ADE, *laughing*:

I took (holds up necktie) this as a souvenir of the loveliest man.

INEZ:

I would have taken a lock of his hair if he'd had any to spare. But I have this ring to remember him. What cheer?

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

A remembrance of our strangest discovery in evolution.

LUCINDA, *mournfully*:

And to think that I wasted the twelve best years of my life scorching my face over a cookstove. (In utter disgust) To catch what? An old woman!

INEZ:

What a sell.

MRS. STRANGE-ADE, *laughing*:

Can you beat it? Mrs. Mann—excuse me. Mr. Mann we are delighted to let you present our bill at Albany.

JOE MANN, *with emotion and commotion*:

I wash my hands of the whole darn business— I'm no longer a male suffragist, I'm not a reformed anti-suffragist, I'm not even a female suffragette. I'm only a cross between a man and a woman hobbled in these toga. I'm on the fence—a mugwump.

(A knock at the door. Lucinda going toward door casts a look of utter disgust at Joe, and looks as if she were saying, "To catch what?")

INEZ, *to Joe*:

Present our bill and we will keep your secret.

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

When we can't keep it any longer, we will give it to the phonograph to keep.

(R) Enter Jane and little Joe).

LITTLE JOE, *in alarm*:

My papa! (Cries) My papa. Look mamma, my papa.

JANE:

Larz! (Tenderly) Hush, darling— Why is my husband tied in that chair?

JOE MANN:

Y-o-u-r husband, Jane? I'm a deputy sheriff, and he is my prisoner.

(Mina, like other women, will forgive anything, except infidelity. she recalls from Larz, and sympathizes with Jane).

MINA:

He's my husband. But I'm sorry for you— So young.

JANE, *getting certificate*:

He's my husband and I can prove it. He told me he'd never been married.

MINA:

Poor child— I'm sorry for you.

JANE:

I'm just as sorry for you.

MINA:

You can have him.

MRS. STRANGE-ADE, *bowing to Inez a la Gaston et Alphonse*:

You first, my dear Alphonse.

JANE:

Perish the thought. I won't take him away from you.
INEZ, *bowing to Mrs. Strange-Ade a la Alphonse et Gaston*:
After you, my dear Gaston.

JANE:

And, besides, if he's a bigamist? (To Joe Mann) When Larz began to make me blackmail you by holding over my head the threat that he'd steal little Joe. I said that I'd file ten day notice required by law to get the guardianship of my child; but under man made laws he got the guardianship of our child without filling any notice. (She sobs) I knew that the Court could call me an unworthy mother, a blackmailer— But who hovered between life and death to give life to this child? He didn't; but I did. (Still sobbing) I was so tortured by the thought that I'd never see my child again that fear nerved me to do his bidding. And I blackmailed an honest man. (Clasping little Joe to her breast) I'd scratch the eyes out of anyone else who'd try to kidnap my baby.

JOE MANN, *while she sobs and clasps little Joe to her breast*:
Who says that Kipling wasn't right.

JANE, *hysterically*:

This baby is mine, mine, mine— No Court can give him my baby now. No, no, no! It can't. For I ain't his legal wife— The legal wives. God, how I pity them! Even the most unworthy mother has the same love for the child that she creates, that I have for mine.

MRS. STRANGE-ADE, *soothing her*:

Of course she has. But fatherhood is so accidental that no judge can understand the anguish of a mother's heart when he refuses her the custody of her child. Children are the Gordian knot of matrimony which the fatherless child is going to sever.

INEZ:

Don't cry.

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

No, don't cry— He isn't hankering for the guardianship of his illegitimate child. But we will try to keep him in jail until our bill is passed and becomes a law. Then, perhaps, he will not be so anxious to acquire a family born out of wedlock.

LARZ:

Haw—haw—haw— Tha American man, I skoll toll you, bane damn fool if ham satisfy vomen vid tha law.

JANE:

I'll go back to the jute mill in Greenpoint, and earn my five dollars a week to support my baby.

JOE MANN:

No. You won't. Mrs. Strange-Ade, my friend, Tom Corey, will see that your bill to compel fathers to support their children born out of wedlock, is passed. And trousers or no trousers, you can count on me as the flying wedge behind the movement.

INEZ:

Hurrah!

MRS. STRANGE-ADE, *pompously*:

The women will see that it is enforced.

(Beta has been releasing Larz who grabs his hat).

MINA:

Beat it back to Turtle Tracks, if you don't want to joint the alimony club.

JOE MANN, *pushing Larz back in chair*:

Not yet.

MRS. STRANGE-ADE, *to Jane*:

Stop that crying— We are but the pioneers and must suffer the hardships. For back of this cosmos, there is a great Mind, who, with the key of science unlocks all mysteries in due time— And scientists are bound to find another biological factor.

JOE MANN, *somewhat puzzled*:

Wouldn't that be retrogression instead of evolution?

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

It may seem inconsistent to you. But—if you mistake a lane off the main road and retrace your steps, that is not retrogression. Therefore, a return to ancestral type is only a step back in the right direction. Unfortunately, when, by accident, man discovered his ability to help perpetuate the race, his talents were side-tracked to mere physical pleasure. But—, when he takes up his task of bread-winner regardless of the birthrate, he will be able to concentrate on religion and good works.

JOE MANN, with a smile:

But in the meantime, Mrs. First Aid?

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

A scientist may be as paradoxical a first aid as she is a strange aid.

(R) Enter the attendant of the sanatorium:

MRS. STRANGE-ADE, surprised:

The attendant of the sanatorium!

ATTENDANT:

Yes; and you have given me the sprint of my life. Come peacefully—

MRS. STRANGE-ADE, taking revolver from her bag:

Take another step at your peril! (Attendant gazing into revolver, recalls).

MRS. STRANGE-ADE:

I was thrust into a sanatorium because I have advanced scientific ideas on evolution. But, have not all progressives been called fools and dreamers? Of course, evolution is a slow process. Do I talk as if I had wheels?

JOE MANN, with deliberation:

What you have said about man losing his happy privilege of helping to perpetuate the race when science gets on the job; and of being able to concentrate on great works when he takes up the task of bread-winner without a side-line, looks good to me.

LUCINDA, chewing the rag in utter disgust:

To catch what? An old woman!

ATTENDANT:

What kind of a man are you anyway? There was a time when men were loyal to their sex. What is getting into the men nowadays? Trying to make women their equals.

MRS. STRANGE-ADE, toying carelessly with revolver:

Humph! Equals. In a few centuries science shall declare her the survival of the fittest. For, the production of the fatherless frog is the forerunner of the fatherless child.

ATTENDANT, dramatically:

I implore you as man to man! Help me get her back to the sanatorium. If she succeeds in making those (bitterly) socialist suffragettes believe that woman, with the help of science, can create and perpetuate the race without the assistance of man— (Weeps). Think of it. If you are any kind of a man! If those suffragettes get scientists going to rob us of all our rights— (In despair) I don't think of it! I don't think of it! (Weeps) It will be worse than the matriarchate; it will be worse than war (sobs); it will be worse than— Oh, well,— (with a wide gesture of despair with both hands) I don't think of it! I don't think of it! (He drops in chair sobbing).

JOE MANN:

I have lived to see women fight for their rights; but I never expected to see men fight for their privileges. (To attendant) Cheer up— Oh, cheer up! That will never happen.

ATTENDANT, jumping up:

Fool! Don't you know what scientists have done? No one can imagine what they will do next. They may find our substitute to-morrow, if they are egged on by those (bitterly) suffragettes— I don't think of it! I don't think of it! (He drops on couch, buries his face in pillows and sobs).

LUCINDA looks at him, then gets bottle and spoon:

Give him another dose of Mrs. Winslow's— (She hands the bottle to Joe, but she happens to glance up at him, and before she finishes the sentence, the thought of her own disappointment comes back to her, and she says in utter disgust): To catch what?

—Curtain—